## O-Level Reform: Lemoore Strike Fighter Squadrons Returning More Jets to Flight Line

× F/A-18E Super Hornets from Strike Fighter Squadron 136 "Knighthawks" fly in formation during a photo exercise over the California coast. The Knighthawks are an operational U.S. Navy strike fighter squadron based at Naval Air Station Lemoore, California, and are attached to Carrier Air Wing One. U.S. Navy / Chief Mass Communication Specialist Shannon Renfroe LEMOORE, Calif. - Two Navy Super Hornet squadrons at Naval Air Station (NAS) Lemoore, California, have reduced maintenance turnaround times and are boosting aircraft readiness as part of naval aviation's maintenance reform initiatives under the Naval Sustainment System (NSS). The NSS initiative leverages best practices from commercial industry to help reform aspects of naval aviation's fleet readiness centers, organizational-level (O-level) maintenance, supply chain, engineering, and maintenance organizations and governance processes. Initially, the NSS is concentrating on getting the Navy F/A-18 Super Hornet fleet healthy before rolling out the approach to every Navy and Marine Corps aircraft.

Strike Fighter Squadrons (VFA) 22 and 122 were the first to implement O-level maintenance reforms following visits from commercial aviation consultants in December and January.

Reforms include assigning crew leads to manage the maintenance on each aircraft and reorganizing hangar spaces, parts cages and tools.

#### Squadrons Empower Petty Officers

The most significant change has been the delegation of ownership over each aircraft in for repairs from the squadrons' maintenance material control officers, or MMCOs, to individual crew leads comprised mostly of firstclass petty officers.

Traditionally, MMCOs must keep track of the status of each aircraft in for maintenance as well as the Sailors working on them, and that's in addition to deciding what maintenance actions are required for each jet and which aircraft are safe to release for flight. Assigning junior-level crew leads to each jet removes some of that burden from the MMCOs and has led to improved communication and increased accountability.

"The crew leads are not making the maintenance decisions; that's still done by the maintenance controllers, but what it allows for is it sheds those maintenance control chiefs of having to know every status of every jet, of every person, all day long," said Lt. Cmdr. Brandon Michaelis, O-level reform champion for Commander, Naval Air Forces (CNAF). "So they can focus on releasing safe aircraft by empowering those first-class petty officers, who can now own that process and know where the people are, know the status of the parts, and brief that up the line." For the petty officers accustomed to doing their job a certain way, reform did not come easy. But the benefits have been evident, said Aviation Electronics Technician 1st class Victor Perez, the leading petty officer for VFA-122's avionics shop and one of the squadron's selected crew leads. "At first the changes didn't feel productive, because we didn't really understand it, but now that we've had some time with it, it's definitely helped improve our processes and communication," Perez said. Used to focusing exclusively on avionics, Perez said serving as a crew lead has forced him to approach the maintenance of his assigned aircraft more holistically. The increased responsibility of bringing an entire jet back online ultimately leads to a greater sense of accomplishment, he said.

"You get kind of personal with an aircraft," he added. "Some aircraft are easy, and some are a struggle to get through. Rather than working on a jet for a couple hours to complete the one thing assigned to your shop and then moving on to the next jet, this way you take more ownership toward completing the whole thing." In some cases, exceptional second-class petty officers have also been considered for crew lead, including Aviation Electrician's Mate 2nd Class Michaela Zadra, a member of VFA-22's quality assurance division. Having crew leads that can focus on individual jets - and communicate with the various maintenance shops relieves maintenance control from having to keep near-constant track of as many as a dozen aircraft at a time, Zadra said. "Crew leads have cut down on empty communication, so now I, as a maintainer who is not stuck behind a maintenance control desk, can walk around to each shop and talk to them personally," she said. "There's a lot more communication one-on-one, instead of one-to-one-to-one and then to maintenance control. It's definitely helped with communication and productivity with the jets." In tandem with the crew lead concept has been the utilization of a

whiteboard alongside

each aircraft that informs anyone passing by as to the jet's status. Information on the boards includes the names of the crew chief and additional personnel assigned to the aircraft, what maintenance is needed, and the expected completion date. "If you physically walk through one of our hangars today, you can tell which ones have been reformed and which ones haven't," said Vice Adm. DeWolfe H. Miller III, CNAF. "You know the exact status of that airplane, you know who's working on that airplane and when they expect that airplane to be up. There's going to be a crew lead who has that ownership." Τn addition, the two squadrons have begun treating the spaces around each Super Hornet in their hangars as dedicated workspaces, with all necessary tools and parts kept beside the aircraft rather than back in one of the various maintenance shops. "We're now treating the airplane a little more, as an analogy, like a patient getting surgery," Miller said. "I am the doctor as the maintainer, and I said, 'scalpel,' and my tool is right there. What we're seeing with that sort of approach, having our tools next to the airplane, having our status board next to the airplane, everything is going to the point of action

being around that airframe, and we're seeing a really significant improvement in our mission capable rates." Both squadrons have also begun keeping larger parts in a centralized "parts cage" in the hangar, dramatically reducing the amount of time Sailors spend traversing the hangar in search of equipment rather than with their hands on an aircraft. "It may be five minutes here or five minutes there, but over the course of a day across all those technicians, that's a lot of time saved by having those parts close to where the job is being done," Michaelis said. The 84-Day Corrosion Inspection Together, the changes have helped the squadrons achieve one of the first goals of O-level reform - reducing the turnaround time for routine 84-day corrosion inspections down from 10-14 days to three days. The 84-day inspection, so called because Super Hornets receive one every 84 days, is one of the most common checks conducted on the jet and is officially supposed to take three days. "Our average is about 10 to 14 days," Miller said. "It's really important for us to

put some discipline into achieving these checks on a predictable three-day pattern." After meeting with consultants, VFA-22 was the first squadron to pilot reforms aimed at reducing the 84-day inspection time. "They were able to do it in two-and-a-half shifts, and as we've been going through the process with other squadrons, we realize that yes, three days in itself is sufficient, once we weed out the inefficiencies," said Lt. Hasely Clarke, assistant maintenance officer for Strike Fighter Wing Pacific. Clarke said many of those inefficiencies arose from work centers waiting on one another to be finished with an aircraft before beginning their own tasks. "There was a lot of waiting time in between," he said. Time management, communication and multitasking between shops have all improved following the O-level reform, Zadra said, noting shops were encouraged to identify which of their tasks could be performed alongside another's simultaneously. For instance, Zadra said she can check the lights in the cockpit from the side of the jet while someone from the avionics shop inspects instrumentation inside the cockpit.

"It cuts down a lot on worker hours, so we can minimize the time on the inspection," she said.

#### **Initial Skepticism**

A former MMCO, Michaelis said he was skeptical of the O-level reforms when they were initially proposed, but has come around after seeing how VFA-22 and VFA-122 have put the reforms into practice. "It's been a tough pill to swallow, to see how inefficient even when I was in that position, even though I thought we were on point every single time." he said. "To now look back and go, 'Wow, there were a lot of places where I could have improved.' So, that's what's made me a believer, is being able to look in hindsight and realize there's tons of this stuff that I wish I had when I was an MMCO." Michaelis said the plan is to take the reforms to VFA squadrons at NAS Oceana, Virginia, before rolling them out across the Super Hornet community and, ultimately, to other platforms.

"As we migrate this and expand it across all type-model-series, I'm excited about what this is going to do for our future," Miller said. Further evidence of the reform's efficacy will come when squadrons can keep their Sailors on normal work schedules while preparing for deployments, Michaelis said.

"Before we go on detachments or on deployment, we often work Sailors 12 [hours] on, 12 off, sometimes seven days a week," he said. "The proof is when, on a Thursday, we can let our people out for a three-day weekend because our jets are up and ready to go, and we saw that recently in one of our transformed squadrons."

## Schiebel Wins Norway's Tender for UAS Deployment in the Arctic

Schiebel's Camposter S-100 will start tests with the Norwegian Coast Guard in fall 2019. Schiebel VIENNA, Austria – Norway's Andøya Test Center selected Schiebel's market-leading Camcopter S-100 vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL) unmanned air system (UAS) for extensive search-and-rescue trials as part of the Arctic 2030 project, the company said in a May 2 release.

In a typical configuration, the Camcopter S-100 operates six hours

continuously and is able to simultaneously carry multiple payloads, offering significant payload flexibility to the user. Therefore, the S-100's missions deliver aerial views that reach considerably farther than manned helicopters. The S-100 also offers a number of key advantages for naval operations in the Arctic. As a VTOL platform, the Camcopter does not require any additional start or recovery equipment and its minimal footprint is perfect for offshore patrol vessels with small deck sizes. The S-100 also distinguishes itself through its ability to perform in the harshest weather conditions, flying at temperatures down to -40°C. This has been proven in a series of intensive trials, such as the Canadian icebreaker operations. In this particular case, the Camcopter S-100 was deployed 60 nautical miles north of Fogo Island, offshore Canada, providing a wide-view image of the ice structure as well as identifying the boundaries between flat and rough ice. The goal of the Andøy Municipality project is a demonstration of VTOL UAS use in the Arctic region in an effort to increase maritime safety. For this purpose, the Camcopter S-100 will be equipped with an electro-optical/infrared camera gimbal, an Overwatch Imaging PT-8 Oceanwatch payload, an automatic identification system

receiver and a maritime broadband radio by Radionor. Such a combination of payloads is intended to strengthen emergency preparedness in the region and provide search and rescue mission support. Tests are scheduled to commence in the fall of 2019 with the UAS being deployed from Norwegian Coast Guard vessels in Andfjorden, Northern Norway. More operations are planned in Spitsbergen in the spring of 2020. "This is clearly an important milestone in the project," said Gunnar Jan Olsen, general manager of the Andøya Test Center. "We have already gained some experience with the Schiebel Camcopter S-100 UAS during an impressive demonstration in 2017. We believe that these current, more extensive S-100 trials will demonstrate that maritime safety in the Arctic can effectively be increased with the help of VTOL UAS."

## Coast Guard Commissions Newest FRC in San Diego

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Adm. Charles Ray, the U.S. Coast Guard vice commandant, delivers his remarks during the commissioning ceremony for the Coast Guard Cutter Benjamin Bottoms at Coast Guard Sector San

Diego, May 1. The Benjamin Bottoms will operate throughout the 11th Coast Guard District which includes all of California and international waters off of Mexico and Central America. U.S. Coast Guard / Petty Officer 1st Class Patrick Kelley SAN DIEGO -The Coast Guard commissioned the newest California-based 154foot Fast Response Cutter in San Diego, May 1, the Coast Guard 11<sup>th</sup> District said in a release of the same date. The Benjamin Bottoms is the fourth Sentinel-Class Fast Response Cutter (FRC) to be homeported at Base Los Angeles-Long Beach. While these ships will be based in San Pedro, they will operate throughout the 11th Coast Guard District, which includes all of California and international waters off of Mexico and Central America. "Radioman First Class Benjamin Bottoms is a Coast Guard hero," said Adm. Charles Ray, the Coast Guard vice commandant. "He was the embodiment of honor, commitment and sacrifice - the motto of this new cutter." FRC's are 154-foot multimission ships designed to conduct drug and migrant interdictions; ports, waterways and coastal security operations; fisheries and environmental protection patrols; national defense missions; and search and rescue.

To date, the Coast Guard has accepted delivery of more than 30 FRCs. Each ship is designed for a crew of 24, has a range of 2,500 miles and is equipped for patrols up to five days. The FRCs are part of the Coast Guard's overall fleet modernization initiative.

FRCs feature advanced command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance equipment as well as over-thehorizon response boat deployment capability and improved habitability for the crew. The ships can reach speeds of 28 knots and are equipped to coordinate operations with partner agencies and long-range Coast Guard assets such as the Coast Guard's National Security Cutters.

FRCs are named in honor of Coast Guard enlisted leaders, trailblazers and heroes. The four California-based FRCs are:

Forrest Rednour (WPC-1129): Rednour aided in the rescue of 133 people during the sinking of the U.S.A.T. Dorchester, Feb. 3, 1943. He was awarded the Purple Heart and Navy and Marine Corps Medal for his actions. Rednour lost his life in the sinking of the Coast Guard Cutter Escanaba in June 1943.

**Robert Ward (WPC-1130):** Ward operated beach-landing boats during the Normandy invasion. He landed his craft on the

Cotentin Peninsula and rescued two stranded boat crews in the face of a heavily fortified enemy assault.

Terrell Horne III (WPC-1131): Horne was murdered by suspected drug smugglers who intentionally rammed the boat he and fellow Coast Guardsmen were aboard during law enforcement operations near Santa Cruz Island off the Southern California coast in December 2012. Horne pushed one of his shipmates out of the way of the oncoming vessel attack and sustained fatal injuries.

Benjamin Bottoms (WPC-1132): Bottoms was part the Coast Guard aircrew that rescued an Army aircrew from a downed B-17 off the east coast of Greenland in 1942. Bottoms and the pilot conducted the first landing of a cutter plane on an icecap and commenced a two-day rescue over a rugged arctic terrain that required multiple flights. During the second day of rescue operations, radio contact with Bottoms' plane was lost and he was declared missing in action.

#### HII Delivers Eighth National

# Security Cutter Midgett to U.S. Coast Guard

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With the signing of ceremonial documents, custody of the National Security Cutter Midgett is officially transferred to the U.S. Coast Guard. Left to right: Cmdr. Brian Smicklas, Midgett's executive officer; Capt. Travis Carter, commanding officer, Project Resident Office Gulf Coast; and Derek Murphy, HII's NSC program manager, perform the ceremony. Derek Fountain/Huntington Ingalls Industries

PASCAGOULA, Mississippi – Huntington Ingalls Industries' Ingalls Shipbuilding division delivered the National Security Cutter Midgett (WMSL 757) to the U.S. Coast Guard on May 1, the company said in a release. Midgett is scheduled to sail away in June and will be commissioned later this year.

"We have a mission statement in the NSC program that says during the construction of each NSC we will provide the men and women of the United States Coast Guard with the finest ship in their fleet," said Derek Murphy, NSC program manager. "This excellence will be provided by our shipbuilders through working safely, attention to detail and ownership of work. Since the beginning of construction on NSC 8, we've seen an amazing transformation, made possible by the thousands of people who poured their heart and soul into this ship."

"From a homeland security and defense perspective, this ship provides unmatched command and control."

Cmdr. Brian Smicklas, Midgett's executive officer, acting

commanding officer

Ingalls has now delivered eight Legend-class NSCs and has one more under construction and two more under contract. Stone (WMSL 758) is scheduled for delivery in 2020. In December of 2018, Ingalls received two fixed-price incentive contracts with a combined value of \$931 million to build NSCs 10 and 11.

"From a homeland security and defense perspective, this ship provides unmatched command and control," said Cmdr. Brian Smicklas, Midgett's executive officer and acting commanding officer.

Midgett navigates the Gulf of Mexico during her builder's trials on Jan. 22. Video by Derek Fountain/Huntington Ingalls Industries

"We've reached a number of accomplishments and milestones up to this point. However, there's more work to do on the water. We have record drug flows in the eastern Pacific, and there are traditional Western Hemisphere missions that our Coast Guard brothers and sisters are conducting on the water every day. We also see a large increase in demand for the geographic combatant commanders for this specific National Security Cutter capability, and we're excited to fill that and be a part of the national fleet."

NSC 8 is named to honor the hundreds of members of the Midgett family who have served in the U.S. Coast Guard and its predecessor services. At least 10 members of the family earned high honors from the Coast Guard for their heroic lifesaving deeds. Seven Midgett family members were awarded the Gold Lifesaving Medal, the Coast Guard's highest award for saving a life, and three were awarded the Silver Lifesaving Medal.

## HII Wins LCS Planning Yard Contract Worth a Possible \$931.7 Million

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Ingalls Shipbuilding division HII's in Pascagoula, Mississippi. Lance Davis/Huntington Ingalls PASCAGOULA, Mississippi – Huntington Ingalls Industries' Ingalls Shipbuilding division has been awarded a cost-plus-award-fee contract with a potential total value of \$931.7 million for planning yard services in support of in-service littoral combat ships (LCS), the company said in a May 1 release. The contract, which includes options over a six-year period, also provides work packages for HII's Technical Solutions division. "Ingalls Shipbuilding will build on 35 years of planning yard experience to join our Technical Solutions division in fully supporting this life-cycle work on the LCS program," Ingalls Shipbuilding President Brian "Our talented shipbuilding team has the Cuccias said. resources and program management experience necessary to ensure the post-delivery work on the LCS program meets the requirements and missions of our U.S. Navy customers."

"Our talented shipbuilding team has the resources and program management experience necessary to ensure the post-delivery work on the LCS program meets the requirements and missions of our U.S. Navy customers." The planning yard design services contract will provide the LCS program with post-delivery life-cycle support, which includes fleet modernization program planning, design engineering and modeling, logistics support, long-lead-time material support, and preventative and planned maintenance system item development and scheduling. Unique to this planning yard effort is the requirement to manage the scheduling of all planned, continuous and emergent maintenance and associated availabilities. Most of the work will be accomplished in Pascagoula and Hampton, Virginia, by designers, engineers, logisticians, planners, program managers and a variety of additional subject matter experts. Ingalls and Technical Solutions will also provide waterfront support in the LCS homeports.

## DARPA Director Praises Navy's Aggressive Use of Autonomous Sea Hunter

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Sea Hunter is moored at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam,

Hawaii. The director of DARPA on May 1 praised the Navy's aggressive use of the unmanned surface vessel. Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Nathan Laird The director of the nation's premier government innovation organization is excited about the U.S. Navy's aggressive use of an unmanned surface vessel to experiment with the military applications of advanced automation and artificial intelligence. "The most exciting thing I'm really happy with the Navy right now is what they're doing with the Sea Hunter, which is an autonomous 132-foot surface ship that DARPA demonstrated a couple years ago," Steven H. Walker, director of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, told a Defense Writers breakfast on May 1. "The Navy has really taken that and is using it and experimenting with it." Walker cited Sea Hunter's voyage last fall from San Diego to Hawaii and back with no humans on board to control it, "which I think demonstrates the autonomous capability we put into that program." "They're really interested in how that helps them with their distributed lethality program," and using Sea Hunter as "the basis for their medium-size and large-size unmanned surface vessels. I'm really excited about where they're taking that system." The Navy is projecting unmanned vessels as a key element of its

future combat fleet and has proposed buying 10 "large"

unmanned ships over the next five years. It has not defined the size and capabilities of those vessels. Although the Navy has not indicated whether it plans to test weapons on Sea Hunter, the likelihood that some of its future unmanned vessels will be armed raises the controversial issue of what control humans will have over weapon employment by autonomous platforms. × Sea Hunter completes an autonomous sail from San Diego to Hawaii and back — the first ship ever to do so autonomously. U.S. Navy photo DARPA, which is pursuing advances in artificial intelligence (AI), studies the ethical issue of weaponized unmanned systems. "I think it's still important to have that lethal decision rest with the human," Walker said. But, he noted, "Sea Hunter has a lot of potential uses that don't involve weaponizing it," such as mine countermeasures and as a sensor. "The key to autonomy, particularly in the ocean, is getting out and experimenting, testing how these things work," which was why he was so pleased with the Navy's use of Sea Hunter. Much of Walker's discussion with defense reporters focused on DARPA's work on AI, which it has been doing for 50 years.

"Sea Hunter has a lot of potential uses that don't involve weaponizing it."

DARPA director Steven H. Walker

"We're pretty excited, not only by the latest advances in machine learning, but moving into what we call the third wave [of AI] - how humans and machines become partners. Not just using machines as tools but as partners," he said. "If we actually can build this team, you can think about all sorts of things that warfighters could do more effectively in a time of war."
Walker also discussed DARPA's work developing more powerful lasers in smaller packages and in moving hypersonic technology into useable weapon systems.

Having demonstrated solid state lasers, which while fairly powerful were "still pretty big," DARPA is focusing now on fiber lasers, which have the promise of even greater power in much smaller packages. Walker said he expected to fully demonstrate a high-powered fiber laser by the end of the year.

He said the first military application for those more powerful lasers "comes in ships and ground vehicles, where weight and size are not as big an issue. I think we're still a ways away from putting these things on airplanes."

One of DARPA's highest priorities is advancing hypersonic technology, which Walker said the United States led the world, but which "some of our adversaries" have turned into capabilities. Hypersonic generally is described as Mach 5 or faster. China and Russia have demonstrated different forms of hypersonic aircraft.

DARPA is working on two applications of hypersonic — a boostglide missile, which is rocket-propelled to a high altitude then glides at hypersonic speeds to a target, and a propelled system that may use a rocket to get to hypersonic velocity then maintains that speed with some form of air-breathing engine, such as a scramjet.

He expected to fly each of those systems late this year or early in 2020.

"The advantage of hypersonics is not only the speed but the range and maneuverability," Walker said.

#### Lockheed Develops Rack to Make F-35A/C a Six-Shooter

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Marines prepare F-35B Lightning II aircraft on the flight deck of the amphibious assault ship USS Wasp. The F-35B can't accommodate the new Sidekick weapons rack, as its weapons bay is too small, but the F-35C, the Navy's variant of the joint strike fighter, can. Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Benjamin F. Davella III ARLINGTON, Va. - The builder of the F-35 Lightning II joint strike fighter has designed a new weapons rack to enable the aircraft to carry two more missiles internally. The new rack, called Sidekick, enables each of the two weapons bays of the Air Force F-35A and Navy carrier-capable F-35C to carry three AIM-120 Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missile (AMRAAM) instead of the current two, for a total of six internally carried AMRAAMs.

Speaking May 1 to reporters at a Lockheed Martin media briefing, a company F-35 test pilot, Tony 'Brick' Wilson, said the rack was developed entirely with company internal research and development funds.

"The extra missiles add a little weight but are not adding extra drag."

Tony 'Brick' Wilson, F-35 TEST PILOT

The rack is not compatible with the vertical lift Marine Corps F-35B version, which has smaller weapons bay.

The F-35 can carry more AMRAAMs on external pylons, but Wilson pointed out that carrying two more internally preserves the stealth characteristics of the F-35. "The extra missiles add a little weight but are not adding extra drag," Wilson said. Wilson also said the F-35 has the external structural capacity for hypersonic weapons should that be required in the future. He also said the company, working with the Air Force Research Lab, has developed and installed on the F-35A - six years ahead of schedule - the Auto Ground Collision Avoidance System (AGCAS). The AGCAS has "saved eight pilots' lives," Wilson said. He said the AGCAS will be installed later on the F-35B and on the F-35C in 2021.

## Navy Leaders to Meet May 16 to Assess Sub Construction Delays, Columbia Class Schedule, Secretary Tells

#### House Panel



An artist rendering of the future Columbia-class ballistic missile submarine. U.S. Navy leaders will meet with industry officials in May to examine how they can add more space in the tight schedule to build the first of the Columbia-class ballistic missile submarines, Navy Secretary Richard V. Spencer said. U.S. Navy illustration.

U.S. Navy leaders will meet with industry officials in May to examine how they can improve the increasingly challenged submarine production program and try adding more space in the tight schedule to build the

first of the Columbia-class ballistic missile submarines, Navy Secretary

Richard V. Spencer said April 30.

The Navy would like to increase the production of its Virginia-class attack submarines from two a year to three to

stop the decline in the already inadequate number of attack boats. But that pace is hampered by the fact that the two shipyards building those boats also are responsible for getting the Columbia class into service by 2031, when the Navy's Ohio-class boomers will be unable to continue their crucial strategic deterrence patrols, Spencer said.

"We do have concerns," Spencer told the House Appropriations Defense Subcommittee. To address those issues, the Navy will sit down with industry leaders May 16 to assess the sub construction yards and the supply chain and seek to "build in margin where we can" for the Columbia-class schedule.

"If we do not, it will run off the rails," Spencer said in response to questions from the panel responsible for providing the money the Navy Department will need for all its programs.

In addition to the questions the appropriators had about the Columbia class, the Navy's self-declared No. 1 procurement priority, the subcommittee's chairman, Rep. Pete Visclosky (D-Indiana), hounded the Navy leaders on the chronic problems in submarine maintenance and acceptance of new warships with multiple material problems.

Visclosky pointed out that three of the older Los Angeles class attack submarines — Boise, Columbus and Hartford — are no longer certified to submerge because they have not received maintenance that is overdue. He emphasized that Boise was scheduled to go into the repair yard in 2013 but still is waiting for an opening.

And Visclosky was particularly troubled by the Navy failing to request funds to repair the three inoperable submarines in its regular fiscal 2020 budget request but added them to the unfunded requirements list.

Spencer and Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John M. Richardson conceded they were having trouble getting submarines into required maintenance, which was aggravating the inability to meet combatant commanders' requests for the attack boats, with some reports putting the shortfall as high as 50 percent.

The two Navy leaders argued that the submarine maintenance problem stemmed from the sharp reduction in funding during the years when the Budget Control Act forced sequestration.

But Visclosky replied that "sequestration happened some time ago" and Congress "provided a lot of money" the last two years.

Spencer said the shipyards cut their skilled work force during the lean years and are now working to replace those workers and improve their aged facilities. He and Richardson emphasized the Navy's program to modernize the government-owned shipyards and to incentivize the private yards to also update and expand.

Visclosky also demanded the Navy provide details on the

problem highlighted in a recent Government Accountability Office report showing a long list of new ships the Navy has accepted from the builders with a range of deficiencies. He stressed the aircraft carrier Gerald R. Ford (CVN-78), the first in its class of aircraft carriers, is not expected to be operational until 2023, nearly five years later than expected because of numerous construction deficiencies.

The chairman wanted to know how the cost of correcting those flaws was divided between the Navy and its contractors, noting that GAO indicated the government has been paying 96 percent. Spencer promised to provide the data.

#### Australia to Purchase Second Triton UAV

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CANBERRA, Australia — The Australian government has agreed to purchase a second MQ-4C Triton, Northrop Grumman Corp., manufacturer of the aircraft, said in a release.

Australia's 2016 Defence White Paper identified the requirement for seven high-altitude, long-endurance Triton unmanned aircraft. Northrop Grumman will deliver the Triton through a cooperative program with the U.S. Navy.

"Northrop Grumman is excited to develop this unrivaled

capability for the Royal Australian Air Force," said Doug Shaffer, vice president and program manager for the Triton at the company. "Triton will provide the Australian Defence Force a high-altitude, long-endurance system for intelligence, reconnaissance and broad-area surveillance missions to enhance the security of Australia's borders."

Defence Minister Christopher Pyne identified "people smuggling and the exploitation of our natural resources" as threats that Triton's capabilities can help to address.

Minister for Defence Industry Linda Reynolds identified the opportunities this program will create for Australian industry and said that "there will be significant opportunity for Australian industry to share in billions of dollars of system maintenance and network management functions."

Northrop Grumman is committed to developing a sovereign defense capability for Australia through industrial partnership and participation, direct investment and technology transfer, the company said.

## USS America, USS New Orleans to Forward Deploy to Japan; USS Stethem, USS Wasp to Return to U.S.

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PEARL HARBOR (Jan. 23, 2018) The amphibious assault ship USS America (LHA 6) and its amphibious ready group (ARG) are moored at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam.

SASEBO, Japan – The Navy announced that the amphibious assault ship USS America (LHA 6) and landing platform dock USS New Orleans (LPD 18) will become part of the U.S. 7th Fleet forward-deployed forces in Sasebo, Japan, the commander, Naval Forces Japan Public Affairs, said in a release.

The guided-missile destroyer USS Stethem (DDG 63) will shift its homeport to San Diego for its midlife modernization and the amphibious assault ship USS Wasp (LHD 1) will shift its homeport to Norfolk, Virginia, to undergo scheduled maintenance.

America is capable of supporting the F-35B Lightning II, the Marine Corps vertical-lift variant of the Joint Strike Fighter, as part of an embarked U.S. Marine Corps Air Combat Element.

The United States values Japan's contributions to the peace, security and stability of the Indo-Pacific and its long-term commitment and hospitality in hosting U.S. forces forward deployed there. These forces, along with their counterparts in the Japan Self-Defense Forces, make up the core capabilities needed by the alliance to meet our common strategic objectives.

The security environment in the Indo-Pacific requires that the Navy station the most capable ships forward. This posture allows the most rapid response times possible for maritime and joint forces and brings our most capable ships with the greatest amount of striking power and operational capability to bear in the timeliest manner.

Maintaining a forward-deployed force capability supports the U.S. commitment to the defense of Japan and the security and stability of the vital Indo-Pacific region.

America will provide the Marine Corps with a means of combat operations utilizing the F-35B fighter. New Orleans is capable of ship-to-shore movement by tilt-rotor and helicopter. In addition to combat operations, both ships can conduct humanitarian-assistance operations.